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The war in Iraq has taken us into uncharted territory as a nation and as a society. During the Vietnam War, four percent of the general population served in the military. During World War II, fully twelve percent of our people served. Forms of personal sacrifice and national service were to be found everywhere - planted in victory gardens, or held in war bonds.

Even during the Civil War, a conflict from a different age, more than one in ten Americans fought.

Never in our history has America fought a war of this magnitude, or one that is this difficult, with an entirely volunteer military force composed of only 1 percent of the general population.

And while so much of what is going on in Iraq harkens back to past conflicts, what is occurring within our society does not.

It is true that the historically high percentage of national guard troops fighting abroad has spread the reach of this war farther than some anticipated.

But for nearly all Americans, the immediacy of the war has been dulled by distance. We have never been asked to sacrifice as people. We have instead been told to go about our lives as usual, asked merely to "support the troops" in a

vague sense.

Within this mass of normality lies the lives of those Americans who have actually fought in Iraq - the mothers, husbands, sons, daughters, and siblings who have been sent there, and who have seen things few of us can relate to or even imagine.

They have been asked to fight in a conflict whose architects have largely receded from public view - but not before the failures of these officials made themselves felt every time a soldier was forced to enter a battle without proper body armor, or without a vehicle that would keep him or her safe.

In a very real sense, the families of these soldiers have been asked to endure the same reality - forced to live every moment of their deployment with the fear that their loved one will be injured, or worse.

Despite it all - despite everything that the members of our military and their families have been asked to bear for year after year, the talk of what to be done in Iraq is often clinical.

We should increase troop numbers. We should lower them. We should place more troops here, or send troops there.

Troops are spoken about as if they are simply another machine to be moved about and used at our will.

Our soldiers are human beings. They are our fellow citizens. They have dignity. They have rights. They do not deserve to be cast around as this Administration stumbles forward, seeking to find a solution to a problem of its own creation.

Already, a flawed war plan has forced the members of our military to endure not just the brunt of battle, but also to make up for miscalculation at home.

Tours have been extended, and then extended again, in an unprecedented way. Previously unknown burdens have been placed on our men and women in uniform as a result.

At a certain point, we as a society have to say, enough is enough.

The legislation before us is supported by men like Senator Jim Webb and Representative John Murtha for a reason:

former soldiers know what current deployment schedules are doing to our soldiers and their families.

It will restore some order to the process by prohibiting the deployment of any active military unit to Iraq unless that unit's soldiers have rested for at least as long as they have fought.

It is a simple premise that was followed in virtually every war America has fought. It should be followed again today.

This bill will not tie the hands of generals. If national security or the safety of our troops would be put at risk by a shortened deployment, then this bill's requirements can be waived.

But the President will have to do so publicly, and certify to Congress that his decision is vitally important.

With everything our soldiers are asked to do, it is long past time that the President was forced to explain to Congress and the American people why it is all necessary.

M. Speaker,

This bill is about who we are as a society, about the values we hold. Our fellow citizens have been sent to fight in this conflict. They have asked for nothing from us in return.

But we owe them something. We owe them our support - not in a rhetorical sense, or in blind allegiance to the Administration's claims. But in a real sense - making sure they are given proper training and armor, and making sure they are allowed to rest for an adequate amount of time between deployments.

We have a chance to live up to our responsibilities as a people today. I hope this body is ready to face that challenge.